



Church as a Third Place???

Ray Oldenburg wrote a book entitled *The Great Good Place* where he introduced the concept of the “third place.” Ray contends there are essentially three places where people spend their time: home, work, and a third place. The third place is defined as a public place where people gather to socially interact and share community. Traditionally, this has taken place in coffee shops, bars, parks, diners, and just about anywhere people can gather publically and interact socially. The third place principle is so successful that businesses like Starbucks have built their entire business plan around the concept.

But I have to ask, can a church really be a third place? Before

we answer that question, let’s look at the following characteristics of a third place: neutral ground, social status/rank does not matter, conversation is the main activity, readily available free or inexpensive food or drink, welcoming and comfortable, frequented by regulars but new friends are welcome, and the meeting place is accessible for many people. Does the church meet all of those criteria? The one characteristic the church may have a problem achieving is neutral ground. Can we say that the church is neutral ground? Actually, in my opinion, the church can never be neutral ground. Many secular people would not consider coming to a church to socially interact because of their prior perceptions of church. In fact, does a church want to be





viewed as neutral ground? There is nothing neutral about the Gospel!

Does creating a third place in a church impact the church's ability to go outside their four walls and take spiritual conversation and relationships into the community? After all, shouldn't the church be on a mission in the world? If we create a third place at church, are we creating a safe haven for Christians to come, where they actually take themselves away from the majority of people in need of the Gospel and Christians' example and impact? Aren't Christians supposed to be salt and light in a lost and dying world? We need only to walk next door or across the hall at work to engage someone that needs our Christian influence. The third place for a Christian's greatest impact is in the secular world among the countless lost people God places in our path where we live and work.

Okay, so hopefully you are at least thinking about this! Yes, I believe Christians need to frequent some secular third places in our community to impact lost people for Christ. We cannot withdraw from being in the world. At the same time, creating a type of third place at church can help a church accomplish its mission of creating community and social opportunities. Churches need a large gathering area that is central in location and connects to all the major areas of the church. This large room can be accessed from multiple entrances and can perform many functions. With multiple

worship services and multi-use space becoming more prevalent in churches today, this space can meet many needs. Large gathering areas can house a coffee bar, welcome desks, ministry marketing booths, and media/bookstores. This space can be used as a staging area for multiple worship services, for receptions, fellowship dinners, training seminars and special events. Many churches have an adjacent commercial kitchen for fellowship dinners, wedding receptions, and even for serving daily lunches to the community.



Gathering and meeting space is essential to a church in the 21st century. It allows for multiple uses and functions as an important social center every time the doors are open. Can this concept of third place ultimately be used as a tool to reach others for Christ?

What do you think?
 treid@mgandassociates.com ♦



**SOUTHEASTERN
SAWCO**
ARCHITECTURAL
WOODWORKS COMPANY

5155 Culver Road
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401
205.345.9396 ps
205.345.9388 f
www.sawco.us

Chapel Hill Baptist Church
 Church on the Eastern Shore
 Cottage Hill Baptist Church
 Crossroads Baptist Church
 Double Oak Community Church
 East Bayou Baptist Church
 Fairview Church
 First Baptist Church- Naples
 First Baptist Church- Panama City
 Fixter Memorial United Methodist Church
 Hunter Street Baptist Church
 Kingwood Assembly of God Church
 Mount Zion Baptist Church
 Shades Mountain Baptist Church
 Union Hill Baptist Church
 Word of Life Church

In/Ex Systems, Inc.

Inspired Excellence

Call us for free technical expertise.

1-800-483-8201

info@inexsystems.com

www.inexsystems.com

We provide, install & service top quality speciality construction products:

- Movable Wall Systems
- Accordion Partitions
- Acoustical Products
- Athletic Equipment
- Projection Screens

*Let us team with you to **Inspire Excellence** in your speciality construction projects!
 No project is too big or small.*